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ABSTRACT

A significant portion of the growing adult education populace are employed, at least part-time, in businesses, industries, and professional agencies--they are the corporate learners of America. Because many employees in the corporate community have poor communication skills (creating the need for training in communication, decision-making, and interpersonal relations), the communication profession should examine its role at all levels of the corporate learning enterprise. Advanced and basic speech communication courses are needed both on campus and in the workplace, particularly for the multitude of smaller businesses, industries, and agencies which do not and can not feature their own complex higher educational program. While efforts can be exerted for universities and colleges to cooperate with corporate communities in providing effective adult education, some basic principles concerning the inherent differences between the roles of the education and business communities should also be considered. The objective of the former is the education of the adult learner for individual intellectual development, whereas the corporation sees the same education as a means toward production and profit. This difference will require an effort by both sides to reduce the gap between the world of learning and of work, and to lessen the separation between education and training. (Nineteen footnotes are appended.) (MM)

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Relationship Between Academia and the Corporate Community in Providing Communication Education for the Adult Learner

by

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at
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A significant portion of the growing adult education populace are employed, at least part-time, in businesses, industries, and professional agencies, i.e., they are the corporate learners of America. In January, 1986, the chief economist for the American Society for Training and Development, Anthony Carnevale, reported that "largely unrecognized, corporate learning has grown to be a $30 billion industry, a silent and efficient postscript to employees' formal education."[1] In addition, $5 billion is spent on government training and $180 billion more goes for employee informal, on-the-job, training. In contrast, some $94 billion is spent on formal post-secondary education in America each year. Most of the corporate training concentrates on the 25 to 44 year-olds among white-collar managers, professionals, and clericals.[2]

Our communication profession should be concerned about the role it plays at all levels of the corporate learning enterprise. Because communication is such a popular subject, even outside our academic institutions, there is the propensity for persons to call themselves "communication experts," and offer workshops, seminars, consulting, and other services to employers who seriously want to meet communication needs in their organizations.

This is an exploration of the current relationship between post-secondary institutions and the corporate community in providing communication education for the adult learner. Primary focus is on courses offered in the workplace, but it must be recognized that many adult learners from the corporate community are part-time students in formal college programs. In a special report for the Carnegie Foundation in 1985, Nell Eurich looked at providers for total adult education, and concluded that "to evaluate the corporations' role . . . it must be noted that they paid for over 12 million courses while individuals or families paid for 17 million."[3] Such numbers especially appear to gain attention of higher education now that formal involvement with the baby boomers is starting to subside. Age of enrollees at our urban institution, Indiana

University at Indianapolis, correspondingly has continued its upward trend. Whereas the average age on our campus in 1979 was 24.7, it is now 27.2.[4] In the 1986-87 academic year alone at our institution, there were some 1,000 adult learners of our 23,000 students enrolled per semester who were wholly sponsored by business, international sources, and governmental agencies.[5]

Yet, most formal corporate adult learning comes in classrooms at the workplace. In 1984, the Center for Education Statistics reported that the amount paid for adult education by non-school providers had risen to 47% of overall expenditures.[6] This involves courses often related to organizational communication areas. In summarizing this situation, Gerard G. Gold said in his book, Business and Higher Education: Toward New Alliances: "The great bulk of corporate human resources education and training thus far is performed in-house or through consultants and very little through campus-corporate programs."[7]

There are several reasons why the corporate community is getting into the education business. Some of these include the need to (1) address economic, social, and organizational changes that affect the workplace, (2) allow upward mobility for employers through training for more technical and managerial responsibilities, (3) adapt to the technological changes and developments that make job skills and knowledge obsolete, and (4) provide employee-orientation and sales training for the companies' unique products and procedures.[8]

Even more problematic for our discipline is the perceived need for the corporate community to "train many college-educated employees who lack abilities in a wide range of generic areas such as communication, decision-making, and interpersonal relations."[9] In a 1981 criticism of higher education's inability to deliver some of the basic skills to business, Ernest A. Lynton asserted that "many students obtain baccalaureate and even graduate degrees with inadequate basic skills, particularly in the area of communication. Many of them write badly, speak badly, and listen badly -- all serious

handicaps to the necessary relationships in a complex organization."[10] In 1983, the Center for Public Resources noted the persisting problem by publishing a critical report on "Basic Skills in the U.S. Work Force;" it was based on an extensive survey of companies, labor unions, and school systems. Among other concerns, it lamented the lack of skills in "speaking, listening and reasoning or critical thinking. To ask a question clearly and coherently, to follow instructions, to draw a reasonable conclusion from information given -- all were cited as examples of basic abilities needed."[11]

This is not necessarily a direct indictment of the content, methods, or instructional competencies in higher education's communication classes across the nation, albeit poor examples readily might be found. Difficulties undoubtedly can be attributed to numerous variables, such as poor financial support for staffing basic courses, the communication requirements or absence thereof by some areas, or the intrainstitutional lack of knowledge on campuses of what might be available in contemporary communication departments -- this could be yet another problem of communicators not communicating and/or receivers not listening.

Regardless of the cause, the effect is that many employees in the corporate community have poor communication and other abilities, so many businesses and agencies have added basic skills courses to those taught in their nontraditional classrooms.

Another reason close to us is business' perceived need to educate its own adult learners because of the operational "inflexibility" in traditional higher education. The corporate community thinks in a different operational mode. Time alone is a major factor. The Carnegie Report emphasizes that "the corporate calendar differs markedly from the collegiate lock-step of two semesters and four years. Business-based courses are given practically any time and for any necessary length of time from a few hours, a day, or perhaps

48-hour weeks, semesters, or a year. Time is determined by purpose."[12] Additionally, there are considerations such as the location of the institution, the specificity of the subject needed in contrast with curricular offerings, issues about whether or not academic credit should be given and in what amount for the course wanted. On the other hand, there is pedagogical need and academic integrity which should not be compromised under any circumstances. Sometimes the subject matter, including the research, creativity, refinement, and the like in various areas of communication, requires time-scheduling which seems luxurious to the corporate world, but some subjects cannot be learned instantly, and our academic colleagues must not lose sight of that fact. Yet, as we were reminded by Gordon Darkenwald in the Adult Education Quarterly, "Educational institutions should anticipate and mitigate logistical problems related to such matters as scheduling and excessive demands on the time of corporate managers."[13]

Many of the logistical problems at Indiana University, Indianapolis, are being addressed. Some of the time obstacles for adult learners in communication have been met by (1) our Continuing Studies Program with 167 enrollees in eight communication sections at various facilities throughout the area, and (2) our Weekend College Program, which has 231 students in ten communication classes in Fall Semester, 1987. Both time and location obstacles are met by our Learn and Shop program, in which once-a-week sessions of complete fifteen-week semster communication courses are offered at various daytime and evening hours in training rooms of major department stores at six of the shopping centers located throughout Indianapolis; 151 students are enrolled in eight communication classes of that program.[14] Finally, the Learning Downtown Program consists of one-hour courses meeting at assigned 8-week intervals during the semester; the subjects and syllabi are determined on the basis of need and available instructor expertise, and either offered under established

course numbers or assigned under variable-topics titles in our Department's curriculum. For example, in Fall, 1987, one-hour courses in parliamentary procedure and listening are being offered under established titles, and a course on "communicating with the media" is under a variable title. The latter, a specialized interviewing course, was designed in conjunction with our institution's Indianapolis Colts Project. We realize the usefulness of such courses as this, but also know that a series of these courses alone does not an educated adult learner make.

While efforts can be exerted for universities and colleges to cooperate with corporate communities in providing effective education for adult learners, there are some clear principles which must be understood and not compromised by communication educators in particular or their academic institutions in general.

Perhaps foremost should be the understanding of the inherent difference between the roles of colleges and universities on the one hand and corporate educators on the other. The objective of the former is the education of the adult learner for individual intellectual development whereas the corporation necessarily sees the same as a means toward production and profit in our economic society. The difference is in degree rather than dichotomous, and each can contribute to the other. Ernest Lynton suggests that "colleges and universities are likely to become better institutions and make more progress toward their own objectives if they accept more responsibility for the preparation of individuals to function effectively in society. Corporations are likely to enhance their strength and ability to deal with changing circumstances by placing more emphasis on continuing intellectual vitality and an updating of conceptual foundations as a part of their human resource development. In essence, this will require a determined effort by both sides to reduce the present gap between the world of learning and of work and to lessen

the separation between education and training."[15]

A sub-issue here is that universities must avoid the risk of offering strictly narrow, subject-specific, short-term, task-orientated courses, and provide concomitantly the theoretical bases and insights that will allow adult learners to adapt and change with times and circumstances. Corporations will profit in the long-run by encouraging long-term human development rather than becoming completely myopic with "productivity" goals. Such is not unlike the conflict between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, in which the former wanted the blacks to have specialized training for marketable skills and the latter wanted more broadly educated blacks who could adapt their skills to changing developments. On a continuum between "education" and "training," one can bet that "most of corporate human resource development is at the training end. . . . The orientation of American industry toward short-term payoff has not been conducive to long-range developmental activities."[16]

Communication curricula benefit students by containing theoretical problem solving, and the socio-pyschological aspects of interpersonal, group, organizational and public communication, while not losing track of the practical application which is emphasized by the corporate community. Such a practical perspective, underpinned by academic integrity is the aim of our department's currently evolving graduate proposal in applied communication, designed for the many persons already employed in organizations throughout Indiana, but who need advanced communication theory to apply in modern organizational contexts, with special emphasis on the role of media technology.

As higher educational institutions develop their communication programs to meet the needs of adult learners from the corporate community, the issue arises concerning what clientele they can serve. It is true that the curricula of established large corporate classrooms read like many offerings within academic institutions. The following course titles are not peculiar to any one industry.

They are taken directly from a variety of corporate catalogs, such as the American Institute of Banking, Chrysler Corporation, Consolidated Edison, IBM, Kimberly-Clark, Manufacturers Hanover, Polaroid, and Texas Instruments:

1. Basic Speech
2. Conducting Effective Meetings
3. Effective Communicating
4. Effective Communication--Listening
5. Effective Leadership
6. Effective Listening
7. Effective Negotiations
8. Effective Work Relationships
9. Logical Expression
10. Making Presentations
11. Managing Conflict
12. Managing a Diverse Work Force
13. Motivating Employees
14. Performance Appraisal
15. Problem-Solving Process
16. Selection Interview
17. Self Development
18. Speech
19. Speech Skills
20. Team Building

In reviewing such courses, Eurich confirmed that they "are not limited to entry-level employees. Some of the same titles will be found in courses designed for management and other personnel categories at differing levels."[17]

Yet, the very basic speech communication courses as well as more advanced ones are needed both on campus and in the workplace -- not so much for the above-listed major corporations, but for the multitude of smaller businesses, industries, and agencies which do not and cannot feature their own complex higher educational program. Studies on the subject have confirmed that the roles of traditional educators and employers are hardly conflicting. Suzanne Morse has concluded that, "although traditional institutions should consider the training needs of large companies like IBM or Xerox, the real training market is probably in mid-size or small firms in the institution's community. Big companies have established programs and may have minimal interest in relinquishing any of their training to traditional education. Educational institutions can have their greatest impact on the less developed programs."[18]

Universities can cooperate with the many smaller firms in making needs assessments and making logistical adjustments, and by so doing they can give some quality control to workplace seminars and educational sessions -- with at least more accountability than itinerant, non-accredited entrepreneurs.

On Saturday, October 3, 1987, one writer's wife, who is an executive in a small business, received an advertisement on a "powerful, one-day workshop" on "How to Supervise People." It was to be held in Indianapolis on December 3, 1987 and again on January 13, 1988. Altogether the workshop was to be in thirty-four cities in eight midwestern states during the period from November 2 through January 15. The attendee would participate in programs on eight workshop topics from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The brochure proclaimed that, for $59, after attending this intensive one-day workshop, you'll be better equipped to:

- o Bridge the gaps of age and differing backgrounds/lifestyles to successfully supervise others
- o Deal with different personality types and understand their individual needs
- o Redirect problem employees
- o Keep your high achievers performing at peak levels
- o Promote employee loyalty and commitment
- o Reduce turnover, absenteeism and tardiness
- o Improve your employees' morale, motivation and productivity
- o Use delegation to get more done through others
- o Handle conflicts in the workplace
- o Supervise former peers
- o And more . . . see Workshop Topics inside for details.

The workshop topics inside, including the one on "Building Positive Communication Skills," were formidable, and any could at least be a unit of a bona fide course. The only part missing was "Leaping Tall Buildings in a Single Bound," but perhaps that was deleted in lieu of a lunch-break. In short, while providing functional training suggestions, traditional institutions contemporaneously can retain their long-term sense of education.

But, even preceding the workplace <u>retraining</u> programs, communication departments can make sure that competence in their on-campus students' initial

training is not so frequently lacking. Communication instructors do not always get the opportunity to provide that training on campus. But, when they do teach students who are or will become adult learners in the corporate world, they should remember this admonition of the Carnegie Report: "Higher education can fill its role more effectively by doing a better job of educating on its own terms. It, too, must ask better performance of students in such basic work as organizing and writing research papers, in oral presentation and clear explanation; corporate trainers should not find it so necessary to teach these abilities, particularly as more college graduates enter the work force."[19]

Endnotes

1. Anthony P. Carnevale, Training and Development Journal, 46 (1986), 18.
2. Ibid, 20.
3. Nell P. Eurich. Corporate Classrooms: The Learning Business (Princeton, NJ.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1985), p. 21.
4. Interview with Richard Slocum, Registrar of Indiana University, Indianapolis, September 9, 1987.
5. Statistics from Indiana University of Indianapolis, Office of the Bursar, October 1, 1987:

TERM	TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	# OF STUDENTS	AMOUNT
Fall, 1986	Business	869	$249,840.57
	International	21	30,490.75
	Governmental Agencies	159	133,746.10
	TOTAL	**1,049**	**$414,077.42**
Spring, 1987	Business	738	$221,655.88
	International	18	31,841.12
	Governmental Agencies	236	126,336.89
	TOTAL	**992**	**$379,833.89**

6. Susan T. Hill Trends in Adult Education: 1969-1984 (Washington, DC: Center for Education Statistics, 1984), p. 12.
7. Gerard G. Gold, "Toward Business -- Higher Education Alliances," in Gerard G. Gold (ed), Business and Higher Education: Toward New Alliances (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1981), p.13.
8. Robert L. Craig and Christine J. Evers, "Employers as Educators: The 'Shadow Education System'," in Gerard G. Gold (ed), p. 33. Also see Suzanne W. Morse, Employee Educational Programs: Implications for Industry and Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1984), p. 10.
9. Craig and Evers, p. 33.

10. Ernest A. Lynton, "Colleges, Universities, and Corporate Training," in Gold (ed), p. 66.

11. Eurich, p. 60.

12. Eurich, p. 53.

13. Gordon G. Darkenwald, "Perspectives of Business and Industry on Cooperative Programming with Educational Institutions," Adult Education Quarterly, 33 (1983), 241.

14. The role of our Communication and Theatre Department in that program is analyzed in Robert C. Dick and James R. East, "Learn and Shop: Communication Education in Nontraditional Settings," Communication Education, 29. (1980), 291-5.

15. Lynton, p. 71.

16. Lynton, p. 69.

17. Eurich, p. 63.

18. Morse, p. 66. Also see Craig and Evers, p. 41.

19. Eurich, p. 125.

END

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